



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

MONTANA WOLF PROGRAM WEEKLY REPORT

To: Interested Parties

From: MFWP Wolf Program Coordinator, Carolyn Sime

Subject: Wolf Program Activities and Related Information, February 27 – March 6, 2009

Contributors to the Montana Wolf Weekly are Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), Universities, USDA Wildlife Services (WS), the National Park Service (NPS; Glacier NP; Yellowstone National Park will be reported in the Wyoming Wolf Weekly), US Forest Service, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the Blackfeet Nation.

Highlighted activities relate to: monitoring, wolf – livestock interactions, outreach and education, research, law enforcement, and other miscellaneous topics of public interest. The Weekly Report will be available on each Monday, covering the previous week. It and other wolf program information (including the 2007 annual report) can be found at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

Wolf Monitoring Activities

Staff are focused on preparing the annual report, though occasionally getting out for snow tracking ground surveys and flying as snow conditions permit. It should be completed and released along with the 2009 Interagency Annual Wolf Report within 1-2 weeks.

Final 2008 minimum estimates of the number of wolf packs, total wolves, breeding pairs, the number of confirmed livestock killed by wolves, and wolves killed to address wolf-livestock conflicts will be available in early March 2009 when the 2008 Annual Report is completed and made available to the public. Until then, all media reports of wolves and/or livestock losses should be interpreted with a dose of caution, as numbers provided to the media have been preliminary estimates.

On the 3rd, WS trapped and collared a wolf west of Hall, south of Drummond. Area landowners have been reporting wolf activity in the area where the Willow Creek was removed in fall 2008.

On the 5/6th, Laudon and Lance attended the annual bear-handling workshop as refresher training. Laudon presented FWP's wolf program trapping / safety protocols. FWP's wildlife veterinarian Jennifer Ramsey also attended. About 50 people participated, representing multiple state and federal agencies. Individuals who work in Canada also attended.

FWP encourages hunters, landowners, and other outdoor enthusiasts to report wolves through the online reporting button or to send in one of the pre-printed postcards available at all FWP offices, many US Forest Service offices, and license providers throughout the state. Information provided by the public helps FWP more accurately monitor wolf numbers and distribution in Montana.

Flights: None this week.

Wolf - Livestock Activities

On the 28th, two wolves attacked a calf northwest of Darby. The mother cow was able to fend off the wolves and protect the calf and it survived. One of the wolves returned to the calving pasture Saturday night and on Monday morning the ranch manager saw 2 wolves in his cattle and shot at one of them and missed. More cows/calves will be spread out into larger pastures in coming days. Wolves had been coming back to the pastures each night. WS was authorized to kill a wolf, which occurred on 3-3. WS also caught, collared, and released a wolf on 3-6.

On the 5th, a landowner about 9 miles north of Big Sky near Karst reported a black wolf frequenting the property where there are domestic dogs. FWP gave the landowner crack shells and instruction on how to use them safely, information about wolf-dog interactions during the breeding season and how to avoid conflicts or more serious encounters in the future, and the 10j regulations.

Outreach and Education Activities

On February 27, Bradley talked with the Environmental Club at Sentinel High School in Missoula. About 6 students attended.

On the 3rd, Lance, Sime, FWP's Bertilotti and other FWP staff attended a meeting of Devil's Kitchen – a local area working group near Cascade. It has been meeting for almost 20 years. Updates on the Montana Legislature, status of wolf delisting, area deer / elk herds were provided. About 45 people attended.

Research Activities

See next section.

Law Enforcement and Related Activities

On the 4th, a female wolf that had dispersed from the Red Shale pack in the N. Fork of the Sun River (Bob Marshall wilderness) during summer / fall 2008 / early winter 2009 was killed about 10 miles east of Salmon ID on private land. It was reported to be chasing horses – and up to 5 other wolves were reported to be in the area. It was originally collared with a GPS collar unit as part of a University of Montana research project summer, 2008. This was reported by the landowner as a 10j “take in the act” and the incident will be investigated by law enforcement.

On the 4th, a landowner near Grant reported shooting a wolf that was harassing cattle on private property. No livestock were apparently injured or killed and the matter is under investigation.

Other

NEW -- Delisting Update: On March 6, 2009, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar affirmed the decision by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to remove gray wolves from the list of threatened and endangered species in the western Great Lakes and the Northern Rocky Mountain states of Idaho and Montana and parts of eastern Washington and Oregon and a small part of north central Utah. Wolves will remain a protected species under the Act in all of Wyoming because Wyoming state regulatory framework does not meet the adequate regulatory mechanism requirements of the ESA. The NRM & WGL delisting rules will be published in the next week or two and will become effective 30-days later. See the Department of Interior's press release and listen to a pod cast of the “pen and pad” press conference at: <http://www.fws.gov/>.

History / Background leading up to the 3-6-09 Announcement: On January 20th, as was somewhat expected, the new incoming administration put a “hold” on all new federal regulations that were not finalized and published in the Federal Register as of the 20th. The hold affects all federal agencies, all pending federal decisions, all subject areas. This was not a surprise as every new incoming administration for the last 20 years has done similar and put a “hold” on the previous administration’s pending decisions. All new, incoming federal department / agency heads are directed to review rules not yet published and decide what should be done. Options are to approve them and move forward, modify them first and then publish them, or not publish them in order to take a different course of action.

Since the wolf delisting decision (rule) announced on January 14, 2008 was not yet published in the Federal Register, its publication will be delayed while it is being reviewed by new, incoming federal officials. The reviewers will examine the biological data and legal merits of the decision. It is not known how long the review process will take and when a decision will be made. Secretary of the Interior Salazar will make the decision. Additional information about delisting in the northern Rockies is available at the USFWS website:
<http://westerngraywolf.fws.gov>.

Current Management in Montana until Delisting Takes Effect:

FWP, through an interagency cooperative agreement, is still the lead agency for all wolf conservation and management (within the bounds of federal regulations) so long as adequate federal funding continues to be made available. FWP will continue to monitor wolves, do public outreach, and guide and direct research activities. No public hunting or trapping is allowed. USDA Wildlife Services is still the agency to investigate causes of injured or dead livestock and carry out FWP’s decisions to address conflicts, as guided by federal regulations. Montana will continue to stay involved in litigation and any future delisting developments and will continue to seek the most efficient, successful path to delisting. FWP will also continue its collaborative work with Montana Tribes, other state and federal agencies, and the Montana Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program.

Check the wolf pages on the FWP website for important information and updates:
<http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

Montana Livestock Loss Reduction & Mitigation Board:

There are several openings on the Board that will be filled when Governor Schweitzer makes new appointments. The deadline for the nomination process through the FWP Commission closed on February 15. About 16 names were received. The FWP Commission will make its recommendations to Governor Schweitzer not long after its meeting on March 12.

One vacancy is to be filled through the Montana Board of Livestock. Contact George Edwards or Christian McKay for information about that process: 444-5609 or 444-9312, respectively. The Board of Livestock is expected to make its selections in April 2009.

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To learn more about Montana's wolf population, the Montana program and to help FWP monitor wolves by reporting wolf sign, visit FWP at: www.fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf.

To anonymously report a dead or injured wolf or suspected illegal activity, call: 1-800-TIP-MONT.

To request an investigation of injured or dead livestock, call USDA Wildlife Services directly in western Montana / Helena area at 458-0106 or in eastern Montana / Columbus area at: 322-4303. Or call your nearest FWP representative to have your call referred to Wildlife Services.

If you have a confirmed or probable livestock loss due to wolves, USDA Wildlife Services will supply you with a copy of the Loss Reimbursement Application form. For more information, see <http://liv.mt.gov/liv/LM/index.asp>. Or, contact the Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program Coordinator George Edwards at the Montana Department of Livestock at 444-5609.

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